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## Women on islands, leaders of sustainable tourism

### *Actions plans for Sustainable Tourism*



SMILO (Small Islands Organisation) partnered with the Travel Foundation (TF) to support four islands in their journeys towards sustainable tourism as part of the ‘Women of Islands: Leaders of Sustainable Tourism’ project, supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation and co-funded by the European Union. The islands of Lastovo (Croatia), Kerkennah (Tunisia), Paros (Greece) and Brownsea (United Kingdom) participated to an online training and received support from the TF with bespoke mentoring to help them improve the way they identify, measure and manage the impacts of tourism, focusing on the six key thematic impact areas: water; waste; energy; biodiversity; tourism landscape (including cultural); and socio-economic. As a result of this 6-month expertise, each island partner produced an action plan which contains practical next steps towards maximising the positive benefits of tourism whilst protecting natural and community assets.

Whilst each island is unique in terms of its geography, landscapes and level of tourism development, they also have many things in common. For example, all of the islands, like many tourism destinations around the world, would like to flatten the tourism peaks during July and August, and spread the economic benefits of tourism throughout the year and across a broader population. Tangible product development opportunities that meet current trends and growth in demand, such as for authentic experiences, outdoor recreation and wellbeing activities, are also in abundance in each of these destinations. Being small islands, they also share similar threats to their natural environments and a desire to protect their island way of life.

One overarching trend across all of the destinations was a need to improve the collection and analysis of data to better understand tourism’s impacts on different aspects of the island, including resident satisfaction with tourism. Therefore, more collaborative and participative tourism development practices were recommended to all, alongside better tourism impact monitoring to inform decision-making. Below is a brief summary for each destination.

**Lastovo**, the remotest of the four destinations, is located on an old military base that has recently been designated as a national park. It aims to strike the right balance between providing an income for its residents, many of which might otherwise seek economic migration, whilst preserving the peaceful “quiet and easy” feel to the archipelago. It will be developing products targeted to its desired tourist profile, such as olive-oil production experiences and tastings and farm tours. Lastovo’s marine environment is threatened by sea tourism through boat anchorage damaging Posidonia (underwater sea grass) and solid and liquid waste in the harbour affecting water quality. Collaborative action to increase anchorage points, waste infrastructure and educate boat operators are included in their action plan.

Like Lastovo, **Kerkennah**, has a fragile ecosystem to protect and a wealth of potential tourism experiences for visitors including traditional fishing, local crafts and world-class birdwatching. Decades ago it experienced the environmental consequences of relatively high levels of international tourism along the coastlines and would like to re-build its international tourism industry on a smaller scale and in greater harmony with the natural and cultural environment. Like many small islands, it is impacted by coastal erosion and wants to ensure that tourism is part of the solution to managing that threat. Its action plan includes creating an environmental tourism tax for visitors and the regulation of coastal construction. Recommendations also include carrying out detailed research to understand what local businesses can and want to supply tourism (including indirectly), the extent to which there is international demand for Kerkennah's offers, and most importantly, how to ensure tourism development's full range of impacts are taken into account. Specific actions around electricity usage, including increasing solar energy and improving resource efficiency, particularly in tourism attractions, were also included to address power shortages that coincide with peak tourism.

**Brownsea Island** is also situated on an ecologically sensitive and highly protected area. Its tourism operation and environmental impact monitoring systems are already well developed. By contrast to the other islands in this article, it has very few human residents, most of which work directly within the tourism industry. The main threats identified include the island's dependence on fossil fuels and tourism's impact on the spirit of place, natural and historical heritage. To address these, actions include using the newly formed SMILO Island Committee as a vehicle to get the whole island to agree on a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism, with shared objectives and measures of success. Specific actions include improving energy efficiency, sourcing more renewable energy, increasing local sustainable food procurement and ensuring that the spirit of place, the environment and people are considered alongside finances when making decisions about tourism developments. A new measuring system will be developed to include specific indicators to help track progress towards addressing these threats.

**Paros**, like Brownsea, is already well-established as a tourism destination, but it also has a much larger resident population. Whilst there are concerns about future water scarcity due to construction, including tourism development, the island's primary concerns are, like Lastovo, the need to spread economic benefits – seasonally and demographically - to avoid economic migration, and the impact of tourism on island way of life. Unlike the other islands above, Paros is already experiencing new tourism markets and there is active debate about the desired (and undesired) socio-cultural impacts of new tourism developments. Suggested actions include establishing a representative destination stewardship group on the island, ideally with external facilitation, alongside tourism market and local resident research to allow the group to take informed and inclusive decisions about tourism development. Like Lastovo and Kerkennah, specific product opportunities have already been identified that could attract visitors in the shoulder seasons such as experiences relating to traditional spirits and beer production, music, wine and gastronomy.

For each island's action plan, specific objectives, actions and indicators have been developed to ensure progress can be tracked over time. Longer-term vision statements were also developed collaboratively to help inspire island stakeholder action towards a better tourism product for all – including residents, tourists and the environment.